



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE SACRIFICIAL ELEMENT IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS

REV. GEORGE HENRY HUBBARD

Haverhill, Mass.

In modern times the subject of Christian ethics is taking an increasingly prominent place in the minds of Christian writers and preachers. Numerous volumes upon this theme have issued from the press within the past few years and doubtless many more will follow in the years to come. There is also a certain popular clamor for more ethical preaching from our pulpits. This is one of the signs of the times, and it is a good sign, in so far as it indicates a growing desire for the practical as contrasted with the theoretical or speculative in religious teaching. If ethics be, as Dr. Smyth defines it, "the science of living according to Christianity," then we cannot hear too much on the subject; for it is vital. Is it too much to say that Christian ethics may well become the dominant theme of twentieth-century preaching and religious thought? I believe it will be such.

But if we are to make any real progress in this modern trend of thought, we must first be very clear in our apprehension of it. What is involved in Christian ethics? And what do we mean by "ethical preaching?" In many minds the latter phrase seems to be used mainly as a term of contrast with doctrinal preaching. Or it is preaching that deals with action rather than with thought, with deeds rather than with ideals. It lays great stress upon the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount, but touches lightly on the Gospel of John and the story of the crucifixion. In a word, it covers a limited field of rights and duties, while the highest ideals and teachings of the gospel are eliminated.

As for the published works on Christian ethics, the thoughtful reader is often puzzled to discover in them any radical divergence from the teachings of pagan ethics. (I use the word pagan not invidiously, but as signifying those purely philosophical systems of ethics which are confessedly independent of gospel standards.) Doubtless certain of the distinctly anti-Christian elements of pagan ethics are

rejected and other and nobler elements are carried upward to higher interpretations and more beneficent applications; but, after all, the difference is of degree and not of nature. Writers and preachers alike seem to make Christian ethics identical in essence with pagan ethics, and to miss the one vital element that differentiates between them. To bring out this point, to discover if possible just what it is that distinguishes the ethics of the gospel from all other ethical teaching, and places the science of Christian ethics upon a plane wholly its own, is the task undertaken in this paper.

Ethics is simply righteousness reduced to a science, its laws expressed in scientific terms, its aims analyzed with scientific accuracy. Practically interpreted, pagan ethics classifies all human conduct under three heads, (1) righteous, (2) unrighteous, and (3) extra-righteous; of which classes the first two only come within the field of ethical study and application.

1. Following this analysis, righteous conduct is such conduct as meets the demands of human law and public opinion, or such as secures the greatest good to the greatest number, and so on. It involves the notion of even-handed justice in the relations of man to his fellow; precisely equal advantage to both parties in every transaction, in so far as that is possible; honesty, truth, fairness in the adjustment of rights; personal purity and uprightness. Its subject-matter is principally rights and privileges, and it demands only such concession of rights as may be necessary to secure the greatest benefit to the majority, and even that concession to be made only under pressure of necessity.

2. Unrighteous conduct is such conduct as disregards the laws of nature and of man, and sets at naught the standards of public opinion, the latter being often the most weighty consideration of all. Unrighteousness comprises three divisions which are known as sin, vice, and crime; although these terms are subject to a certain elasticity of interpretation by different minds and under varying circumstances.

3. The third field of the "extra-righteous" is also, from its very nature, the *extra-ethical*, since ethics is concerned only with righteousness and its opposite, unrighteousness. Yet this field of the extra-righteous is by far the most extensive of the three. It is the realm of benevolence and charity, the parade-ground of all self-sacrifice and

privation. The hero who offers his life on the altar of his country, the martyr who goes to the stake for his religion, the philanthropist who devotes his life and his wealth to relieving distress and suffering among men, who goes out of his own immediate circle and seeks to benefit those who have no kindred or social relation with him—these are not classified among examples of the ethical, but are looked upon as representing a larger and higher ideal of life. Everything within the sphere of ethics rests upon a basis of moral obligation; but this class of actions is optional. In other words, according to the pagan ideal duty ends where self-sacrifice begins, sometimes long before it reaches that point.

For example, an employer pays his workmen promptly, justly, or generously, and we call it ethical. Out of his abounding wealth he ameliorates their conditions of life, builds model tenements, libraries, gymnasiums, and the like, and we call it benevolent. A father provides for his family, and we call it duty. From his surplus earnings he clothes a few poor or endows hospitals, and we call it charity. A social queen leads a pure life and maintains an unsullied character, and we call it morality. If by chance she manifests an interest in her less-favored sisters or devotes her powers to the rescue of the fallen, we call it bounty. For such characters as John Howard, Elizabeth Fry, Clara Barton, Andrew Carnegie, the Earl of Shaftsbury, the Jesuit missionaries to the Iroquois, or Mary Reed, the missionary to the lepers of Burmah, pagan ethics has no place in its categories. Their conduct is in the realm of the extra-moral. Thus arises a sharp distinction between the obligatory and the optional. The one class of acts is limited and definite, and represents universal duty. The other class, infinite in its range, excites admiration but does not appeal to the conscience. To pour out one's wealth in response to human need, to give one's life freely in sacrifice for others, that is a universal privilege, but not a universal moral necessity.

This is the unvarying attitude of pagan ethics. And it is practically the attitude of writers and preachers upon Christian ethics. While the element of sacrifice is perhaps not so completely elided from their ideals of righteousness, it certainly is not insisted upon as a necessary factor of the ethical ideal, except to a very limited degree. As "Ian Maclaren" truthfully says, "Theological science has shown an unfor-

fortunate tendency to monopolize the cross, till the symbol of salvation has been lifted out of the ethical setting of the gospels and planted in an environment of doctrine."

Nominally the Protestant world repudiates the idea of "works of supererogation." Doubtless also that repudiation is real, in so far as the phrase applies to the transference of the merit of such works to lives that are deficient in righteousness. But in so far as works of supererogation imply the possibility of surpassing merit, of extra-righteous acts, the average Protestant believes in them just as devoutly as does his Romanist brother. He accumulates wealth and has no thought of wrong in such accumulation, however great, provided he has not been dishonest or oppressive in his methods of acquisition. Or, having little means, he lives quietly and temperately in the community, harming no one, and flatters himself that he has fulfilled the law of righteousness although there are men and women in that same community who are being done to death by temptation and sin and whom he might help if he would but go out to seek them. Or as a woman, she directs her home with care and never permits any questionable features in her social functions, is conventionally religious and correct in all things for conscience' sake. Yet it never disturbs her conscience that there are multitudes of young men and women in her city who are drifting into paths of vice for want of the social uplift which she might give them. They are outside her circle of acquaintance, therefore beyond the limit of her duty. To help them would be philanthropy, which has no assignable relation to conscience.

In thus practically following the track marked out by their pagan fellow-students, the writers upon Christian ethics have missed the vital truth which differentiates Christian from un-Christian or non-Christian ethics. The gospel of Jesus Christ knows only a twofold classification of conduct, *righteous* and *unrighteous*. The sphere of the righteous is limited only by the highest possibilities for good in each human life. Not only does it include the possibility or privilege of sacrifice, but it makes sacrifice a necessary element of righteousness. All true righteousness is sacrificial. The most spotless purity, the most winning kindness, the most free-handed benevolence, that stops short of absolute self-immolation, is unholy. The spirit of the

world, the essence of sin, the fires of hell, are all spelled with the four letters of the word "self." We have not discovered the real meaning of the gospel or its bearing upon our life till we understand that Calvary is a permanent feature on the landscape of all Christian morality and that the cross is a necessary instrument for carving out every true Christian character.

We are wont to speak of the willing self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross as a picture of transcendent love and so it is; but it is more; it is a picture and an example of *perfect righteousness*. Not even in the supreme moment of suffering and self-renunciation did Jesus surpass by so much as a hair's breadth the requirements of Christian morality. To have evaded the cross would have put the brand of sin upon all those words of grace and those works of kindness. He filled the measure of perfect righteousness to the brim, but it did not overflow, no not by so much as a single drop. Even Jesus Christ never did perform, never could perform, a "work of supererogation."

The gospel has been preached in the past, is often preached today, as a scheme for eliminating the cross from our common human life by transferring its weight and pain wholly to the life of Jesus. The doctrine of the atonement has been so interpreted as to make the sacrifice on Golgotha an inimitable and unapproachable divine prerogative instead of being what the gospels teach us it was, an example for every Christian's emulation. I would not assert that such a doctrine of atonement has no place in the evolution of Christian character and thought, even though it be not found in the New Testament; for it may be necessary that the thinking of the historic church and the experience of the growing disciple pass through all the foetal stages of paganism and Judaism ere it attains to the stature of the mental and moral fulness of Christ. And that doctrine may have had a mission in developing the sense of divine justice which is one of the elementary conceptions of all true morality. Nevertheless it has often worked to stultify the highest ideals and to paralyze noble endeavor. In its best interpretations the doctrine has awakened in men a sense of indebtedness which has found expression in a certain rugged morality that keeps the Decalogue and makes men honest and conscientious in the ordinary relations. But it does not call upon any man in the name of righteousness to deny or to sacrifice himself for others. In fact, it

distinctly teaches that vicarious suffering is impossible except in the case of Jesus.

Widely different from this creation of theologians and schoolmen is the ethical ideal of Jesus and his apostles. That ideal erects a cross in the pathway of every disciple. "If any man will come after me, let him deny *himself*, and take up *his* cross, and follow me." "If any man renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Why did Jesus say that? Because perfect discipleship requires something more than perfect morality? No; but because this was to be the standard of morality henceforward for all who should accept his leadership.

"I am crucified with Christ," said Paul. And Peter further affirmed that "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps." These utterances testify to the literal interpretation which the apostolic writers put upon the words of the Master.

Clearly therefore the sacrifice of Jesus was never intended to be proclaimed as a unique act, a service which by its universal efficacy should render all similar service forever unnecessary or impossible. It was a part of the great example. It was the setting up of a new ethical standard. It was designed to infuse the spirit and principle of sacrifice into the ordinary life of humanity. The mission of Jesus was the mission of every disciple. He was no more bound to yield himself to the cross of Calvary than you and I are bound to ascend the mount of sacrifice that confronts us in the pathway of human redemption.

He is no herald of new and unheard-of ideas, but a preacher of the old gospel of Jesus and of Paul who says:

The call of the cross to Christ was the summons of the disciples to a larger career in God's great world of need and sorrow and sin. It was a call to move out from the old life of self-seeking and misunderstanding and pupilage and correction into the new life of self-renunciation and intelligent and tireless action. In a word, the cross that called their Lord to a sacrificial death, called the disciples to a sacrificial life. And this calling cross forever stands, a continuous summons to our faith and devotion to manifest ourselves in self-denying lives of love and work. Whenever the Son of man appears to summon us to action, it is by the way of the cross that he inevitably leads us.

We must not, however, be carried away with the notion that the

principle of sacrifice involves a continuous sense of pain and privation, that it means the utter loss of joy in the Christian life and service. Not at all. On the contrary those disciples who are forever talking about their "crosses," and who thus betray a ceaseless consciousness of self-denial, though they often claim for themselves a higher spiritual life than ordinary, have not touched the garment's hem of the Christly ideal. True sacrifice is well-nigh unconscious, and so far from filching the joy from the Christian life, it is in itself the secret of highest joy. Those who "walk mournfully before the Lord" are the disciples who know little of real sacrifice. The old Hebrew chronicler tells us that in the great Mosaic ritual, "When the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also, and the trumpets." And it is ever true that the song follows the sacrifice. Of Jesus himself it was said, "For the *joy* that was set before him he endured the cross." I am not then pleading for a deeper consciousness of pain or privation in the Christian life. That is utterly immaterial, if not positively un-Christian. The mediaeval craving for penance and self-torture is nothing less than heathen in its spirit. Rather do I advocate a sacrifice and self-effacement so complete that it shall be wholly unconscious of itself. Only thus can the disciple know *the joy of sacrifice*.

Let there be no misunderstanding when we speak of disciples and the church. Do not imagine that this principle of sacrifice is to be in any sense limited to that part of our life which we are accustomed to think of as religious. Such misunderstanding is a danger against which the preacher of ethics must be continually on his guard; for it is only too common. That Christians should be self-denying in religion while they are self-seeking in business or in society or in politics or in pleasure is the spiritual farce at which the world laughs and angels weep. It is the counterfeit coin by which the currency of the kingdom is debased, making thoughtful men suspicious and unwilling to receive it.

You cannot imagine Jesus Christ carrying on any business for personal and selfish profit; but you can easily picture him as engaging in any calling whereby he could benefit others or advance his great work of human redemption. Peter unconverted was a fisherman for his own enrichment. Peter may have been a fisherman to the end of his days; but if so, the symbol of the cross was as clearly imprinted

upon his boat and his nets as upon his own life. Probably Paul was a tent-maker as long as he lived; and if so, the principle of sacrifice was even more clearly manifest in his trade than in his preaching, for he preached from the sheer love of it, but he made tents from a sense of necessity and duty. Nevertheless I am sure that whatever business he transacted was done on the highest Christian principles.

The only right principle of life in any department of it, the only principle that makes it truly moral, is the sacrificial principle. Until we get this interwoven all through our life we are wrong. Put the test in different words. It was said of Jesus that he came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for others." We put this motto—shorn of its last and most significant clause—on our church calendars, Sunday-school leaflets, missionary tracts, and things of that kind; but would it be an appropriate or truthful motto for the average Christian business house or social gathering or political convention? Why not? Jesus would have carried out the same spirit in any of these relations. He would not have been more self-seeking in one than in another; and he would have used all had circumstances permitted for the redemption of men. We have the record of his attendance and conduct at numerous social gatherings, and while it is evident that he was an exceedingly popular guest, the story of these gatherings, so far as he is concerned, is in perfect harmony with that of his most technically religious service. What he would do we too should do; for he is our exemplar.

There too is the matter of money-making or fortune-piling. How can we reconcile that with the principle of sacrifice? It has been said by a sane and moderate writer of the day: "Today a millionaire is respected; there are signs that in future years a man leaving a huge fortune will be thought a semi-criminal." And he attributes this prospective change in public opinion, not to some new and extra-Christian development of thought, but to the growing ascendancy of the spirit of Jesus. How can one whose sole mission on earth is to minister or serve and to give self in ransom for the lost, how can such an one spend his strength in gathering thousands or millions for himself and his descendants? The time is coming and now is when we must recognize as we have never done hitherto the gospel

principle of sacrifice in what we are pleased to term the secular life. Consecration must get a new and more comprehensive meaning. Self-surrender must include a greater number of elements. The cross must exert a broader and a deeper influence on our life.

Write the principle of self-sacrifice into our ethical ideal and it would demolish much of our self-complacency, it would shed a light wholly new on many an act which we now deem specially meritorious, it would greatly modify the significance of the words "benevolence" and "charity," which we use so readily and with so much delight. It would sweep from our vocabulary a whole class of words by which we describe those acts which we deemed extra-righteous.

For example, Jesus would not call that man or woman benevolent who pours out thousands or even millions of *surplus* wealth in philanthropic enterprise, but never reaches the point in giving where there must be a real sacrifice of selfish comfort or the denial of some needed good. Yet he put the stamp of his approval upon an insignificant gift of a single farthing. Why? Because it cost a living. Because the giving of that little sum meant to the poor widow just what Calvary's cross meant to himself. He would not praise the most zealous activity in religious work or churchly duty that was rendered only in the spare moments, but took no time from profitable industry or required no sacrifice of longed-for rest. Work and sacrifice that cost, these and only these are Christly, only these are righteous.

The times call for a thorough reconstruction of the ethical ideal. The twentieth century demands a religion that shall be less selfish, a righteousness that shall be more redemptive. Hitherto the cross has, in the minds of too many Christians, stood for something that transcends righteousness, even Christian righteousness. We have accepted it as a substitute for our own sacrifice and have imagined that we could do our full duty to our neighbor and even to God while refusing to admit the cross into our lives.

Christian ethics must take higher ground. When Christian righteousness shall be molded upon the principle of Christly sacrifice, when the cross shall be in some true sense the banner under which we serve, whether in counting-house or legislative hall, or factory, or school, or ballroom, or sanctuary, we shall no longer strive in vain. In this sign we shall conquer, even as Jesus Christ won his great victory over the hosts of evil on the cross of Calvary.